Title: Cosmopolitanism and the Print Space: Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan, and *TheVisva-Bharati Quarterly*

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Synopsis

The emergence of print culture in the colonial India, as Partha Chatterjee notes, generated "an entire institutional network of printing presses, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines and literary societies . . . outside the purview of the state and European missionaries" (7) resulting in the formation of the public sphere, that was primarily nationalist in nature. While periodicals like *Yugantar*, *Bande Mataram*, *Swaraj*, *Sandhya*, and newspapers such as *The Leader* and *The Tribune* put forward nationalist sentiments in an extremist manner, journals like *Prabasi* and *TheModernReview* stressed the importance of nationalist ideas in the identity formation of the colonized people.

It is at this point of the Indian nationalist history, that the first issue of *TheVisva-Bharati Quarterly* (further referred to as *VBQ*) came out in the year 1923. Tagore, by this time, disillusioned with the violent face of nationalism regarding the Partition of Bengal (1905), distanced himself from it, and instead envisaged the space of a cosmopolitan identity formation and its praxis in Santiniketan, stressing the free interaction between the cultures of the East and the West in an apolitical space. Thus, when nationalism sought to establish itself as Benedict Anderson's notion of an "imagined community", Tagore was consciously creating an alternative possibility of this community by emphasizing the notion of being one with the world without losing for a moment the indigenous identity. The moment of transformation of *Brahmacharyashrama* to Visva-Bharati in 1921 was the one, when a need was increasingly felt by the institution to clarify to itself its situation within and response to the contemporary reality---a time of formulating its aims and objectives. Despite the presence of *Santiniketan* (1919-26), a monthly that mainly focused on the localized life and events in the *ashrama*, this transformation naturally demanded the shift in emphasis from the local to the global articulating Tagore's theorization and cultural practice in a new medium. It is this need that *VBQ* sought to fulfil by disseminating in the prevalently nationalist public sphere of colonial India the Tagorean notion of cosmopolitanism.

This thesis attempts to see *VBQ* as a textual locus: an autonomous/intellectual space, where the dialogic encounter between the Eastern and the Western civilizations took place, resulting in the expansion of the remarkably nationalist public sphere of the colonial India beyond the culturally/politically limited ambit of the nation in its aspiration to create a globally imagined community: an ideology that found consolidation from Tagore's idea of cosmopolitanism. Using statistical data and analysis of the articles I shall attempt to evaluate the extent to which this cosmopolitan possibility was realized in *VBQ*. The chronological period of my investigation would be from 1923, the year of the journal's inception to 1941, the year marking Tagore's death. Accordingly, this thesis will look at and classify the writings into different sections. In my attempt I

shall try to compare and contextualize Tagore's unique notion of cosmopolitanism, that was expressed in the pages of *VBQ*, with and within the recent developments and debates on cosmopolitanism like particularly, the theorization done by Martha Nussbaum, the debate that went on between her, and theorists such as Hilary Putnam, Benjamin R. Barber and also other seminal developments that follow in the field. I shall also use the theorization of the public sphere by Jurgen Habermas, the writings of Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee as my analytical tools.

While trenchantly critiquing nationalism for its pathological obsession for monolithic/essentialized cultural forms, that not only thwarted the interaction among different cultures in a syncretic space, but also threatened the idea of rationality, non-violence, and justice "with its intense consciousness of self-interest concentrated in a political organization" ("International" 310), in the pages of *VBQ* Tagore repeatedly stressed that his concept of the cosmopolitan self was thoroughly located in first, the tradition of his country, and then in the greater heritage of Asia, providing a pan-Asian impetus in the cosmopolitan negotiation of the self: "I have come to feel that the mind, which has been matured in the atmosphere of profound knowledge of its own country, and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries" ("The Way" 94). Tagore's *Brahmo* upbringing and the life-long impact of the philosophy of the Upanishads also enabled him to a great extent to harmonize the local tradition with the detached pursuit of moral reason in its abstract/universal dimension.

Habermas theorizes public sphere as a domain of our social life, that is ideally inclusive of the different strata, where through an egalitarian dialogue, and the disinterested "public use of reason", public opinion is formed about matters of general interest (24). Opposed to the state, it is a realm of self-clarification of the public, where humanity and authentic subjectivity can flourish, that would eventually become the rational basis for a just government. Resonating the Kantian notion of the disinterested pursuit of moral reason, Habermas identifies newspapers and periodicals as some of the important media through which public sphere is formed. Although public sphere ideally appears to be impartial, Habermas acknowledges its biases and exclusions. Still he optimistically maintains that it is possible to overcome them through a process of immanent critique, where the biases and exclusions are posited against the promise of equality and inclusion— a promise that is inherent in the self-understanding of the public sphere from the very beginning (429). It is in this respect, that we can see *VBQ* as seeking to transform and virtually redefining the predominantly nationalist discourses and structures of the public sphere in the colonial India, and also those of other nations from within by indicating a cosmopolitan outlook.

I tentatively propose to divide the thesis into seven chapters. In the first chapter the theoretical positions regarding the notions of public sphere, cosmopolitanism and nationalism will be dealt with. This chapter will also attempt to historicize the print/public sphere in India, where the inception and development *VBQ* is located. In the second chapter I shall try to delineate Tagore's individual position vis-à-vis cosmopolitanism, and his critique of nationalism. The conceptualization and articulation of the Tagorean version of cosmopolitanism in Visva-Bharati will also be traced in this chapter by probing into the history of the institution, which is necessary to explore the context of the journal. The third chapter will look at the way in which *VBQ* negotiated with its contemporary history, politics and society. The stances that *VBQ* took vis-à-vis nationalism and cosmopolitanism will also be articulated here in an attempt to see how the journal sought to modify the nationalist public sphere of contemporary India. The fourth chapter will explore how in the pages of *VBQ* a conscious attempt was made to achieve synthesis among divergent religious and philosophical positions of both the East and the West. The fifth chapter will specifically deal with Tagore's writings, that were published in *VBQ*. Attempts will be made in this chapter to articulate whether

Tagore was consciously using *VBQ* as a means to disseminate his cosmopolitan stance or not. In the sixth chapter, I shall try to explore the idea of art and aesthetics, that found expression in *VBQ*. Various forms of paintings, illustrations and writings on art and aesthetics in *VBQ* will be dealt with in this chapter. In the seventh and final chapter the evolution of the print strategy of *VBQ*, and its reception will be traced. In each chapter comparisons will be made with the other contemporary periodicals of the age to outline *VBQ*'s distinct identity. In the appendix statistical accounts will be given regarding the total number of writings, which will be subsequently compared with the ones dealing with cosmopolitanism, the nationalist issues, and the orientalist subjects separately, so that objective figures are established regarding the ideology of the journal.

Through such an analysis I shall evaluate to what extent *VBQ*, starting initially as the journal of an institution, could incorporate the cosmopolitan ideology of Tagore and Visva-Bharati within it by engaging in a broader dialogue with the contemporary world, that was against the grain of nationalism, to explore the cosmopolitan possibility of the colonial public sphere of India and the formation of identity in terms of both its global and local aspects.

Notes

1. Since the anonymous declaration is untitled, and appears without any page number at the back of the front cover of the issue, I have titled it "Declaration" in the list of works cited. See "Declaration."
2. Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee attributes the authorship of this anonymous editorial to Tagore. See Mukherjee. Interestingly, the text is not anthologized in the four volumes of *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, published by Sahitya Akademi.

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